

# La Niña to slow spring's arrival

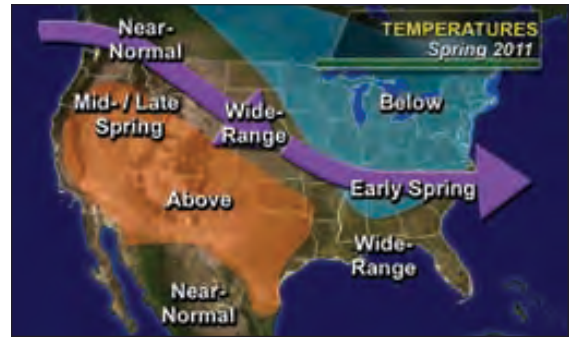
By GREG SOULJE

**L**A Niña's influence on weather across North America will continue well into spring, and perhaps even into part of summer. In general, La Niña will be in a weakening state, but its effects will still be noticeable — perhaps even detrimental — during spring fieldwork and planting. This will be most notable throughout the heartland early on.

Later in the season and perhaps into summer, a trend toward hotter and drier conditions, while of benefit at the onset, may lead to dryness and even drought.

La Niña conditions are characterized by cooler-than-usual temperatures in the central Pacific Ocean. Ocean water temperatures in the equatorial Pacific have some influence on the strength and position of the upper air levels and storm-track-producing jet stream. This upper-level flow is responsible for track and movement of weather systems from the Pacific eastward through the continental U.S.

Much of the spring will feature a more



significant southward shift of the jet stream onto the Plains, with a curl back to the northeast and into southeastern Canada via the Ohio Valley and Midwest. This will generate milder-than-average weather in parts of the Southwest and West, as well as across the Southeast.

Meanwhile, temperatures will average below normal to occasionally well below normal throughout the nation's heartland and at times across the Northeast. A wide range of temperatures will affect the Pacific Northwest and much of the Corn Belt.

## Active precipitation pattern

The precipitation outlook for much of the spring suggests an active pattern for the northern and central Plains, the Midwest and Great Lakes region, New England, and the Mid-Atlantic region.

Storminess is forecast to continue early in the season in the Pacific Northwest. Drier-than-usual weather is forecast across much of the Southwest, the central and southern Rockies, and parts of the southern Plains.

## Planting delays in Midwest

Across the Midwest and Great Lakes region and southward to the Ohio Valley, a challenging winter generated a wild range of temperatures and weather. This active pattern will continue, regarding not only the frequency of cold air outbreaks, but also the number of weather systems.

Temperatures will range from below-normal to well below normal, but with some fluctuations, from the Mississippi Valley to the lower Ohio Valley. Normal to above-average frequency and amounts of precipitation are in the offing. The melting of sizable snow cover along with early and midspring moisture will raise the specter of flooding, fieldwork and planting delays.

Over the remainder of spring, there are signs of a general trend toward drier and warmer to hotter-than-usual conditions.

As for the Dakotas, Minnesota and points southward through the central Plains, a "character-building" winter has left many worn and wary. A cold, active (wet) pattern will continue into midspring. However, while there will be bouts of more

seasonal temperatures, these will be few and far between, and most likely will occur from the lower Missouri Valley southwestward. Do look for a drier mid- or late spring weather pattern except from the Missouri Valley north and eastward, as storm systems continue to frequent the region.

## Summer drought concerns

Looking ahead into summer, there is cause for concern as increased dryness and drought issues in the Southern states may show a northward expansion to parts of the Corn Belt and the remainder to the Plains.

In addition, the further weakening of La Niña conditions may contribute to a rather abrupt shift to a longer-term period of increased dryness. While a recovery to more seasonal temperatures should improve crop development, a trend toward hotter-than-average temperatures will be a concern to producers should the lack of timely rainfall come to fruition.

*Soulje is an ag meteorologist writing from Illinois.*